

MEMORANDUM FOR: Nassau Grouper Biological Assessment Peer Reviewer

FROM: Jason Rueter
Fishery Biologist

SUBJECT: Peer Review of the Nassau Grouper Biological Assessment

DATE: X June 2013

Enclosed please find the biological assessment for Nassau grouper (*Epinephelus striatus*). Thank you for volunteering your time to review this document. Peer review is an important process to science and its application in our administration of the Endangered Species Act. We appreciate your dedication to both the process and the species.

General directives:

1. Please provide comments on the scientific information and data contained within the biological assessment.
2. If you believe that justification is lacking or specific information was applied incorrectly in reaching specific conclusions, please specify.
3. We are particularly interested in historic and current spawning aggregations, their locations, timing, and any management of those aggregations.
4. Remember that the contents of the document are to remain confidential until the Federal Register Notice is published in November 2013. I will be sure to let you know via e-mail on how to obtain copies of the final version.

A few items regarding your peer review:

1. The Office of Management and Budget published a Peer Review Bulletin (December 2004) that requires online posting of this peer review as it has been determined to be “influential.” This peer review bulletin is intended to enhance the quality and credibility of the federal government’s scientific information. To ensure that we have a transparent process for public disclosure, names and affiliations of each peer reviewer is posted online as well as comments. While we must identify peer reviewers by name and affiliation, NMFS has the ability to post a compilation of reviewer comments. Therefore, I will not associate individual comments with reviewer name; rather I will compile the unabridged comments and organize by a reviewer number. Previously submitted Peer Reviews are available at:
<http://www.cio.noaa.gov/itmanagement/prplans/PRsummaries.html>
2. The Peer Review Bulletin further requires that non-Federal peer reviewers complete a “Confidential Conflict of Interest Disclosure” form – I attach the form and request that you return it with your review. I also include an agency circular that includes definitions of some terms.

Please note that you are required to submit a CV with the signed form. Peer reviewers who are federal employees do not need to sign the conflict of interest form; rather they must comply with applicable federal ethics requirements such as those at:

www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/waisidx_07/5cfr2635_07.html.

3. Notably, if NOAA Fisheries receives a FOIA request, anonymity of peer reviewers or comments cannot be guaranteed.

Regarding logistics:

1. I have submitted this information electronically to you. I will also FedEx a hard copy of the biological assessment document, conflict of interest form, pre-addressed/pre-paid FedEx envelope, and a copy of this letter.
2. Please feel free to mark directly on the draft and return it to me via the pre-addressed, pre-paid FedEx envelope included. You may also recommend changes and/or insert comments to the electronic version of the document (using the “track changes” feature of Microsoft Word) and submit it electronically, whichever method you prefer.
3. Please make sure that you return a signed conflict of interest form with the peer review and attach a CV. The conflict of interest form requires your signature.
4. I have included a copy of the Nassau grouper biological assessment – you do not need to return it to me.
5. Please return the draft with your comments by May 15, 2013. Thank you for your willingness to review the biological assessment. NOAA Fisheries appreciates your dedication to the process and the species. Please feel free to call (727- 824-5350) or e-mail me at (Jason.Rueter@noaa.gov) if you have any questions.

Reviewers Selected:

Brice Semmens, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor in the Marine Biology Research Division
Scripps Institution of Oceanography
University of California, San Diego

Richard Nemeth, Ph.D.
Research Professor of Zoology/Marine Biology
Center for Marine and Environmental Studies
University of the Virgin Islands

Richard Appeldoorn, Ph.D.
Professor of Fisheries Biology and Coral Reef Studies
Department of Marine Sciences
University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez

David Olsen, Ph.D.
Chief Scientist
St. Thomas Fisherman's Association